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March 16, 2010

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Sustainable Communities Planning Grant and Incentives Program
The Department of Conservation, Office of Sustainability
801 K Street, MS 24-01
Sacramento, CA 95814

Honorable Members and Staff of the Strategic Growth Council:

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to comment. We are a nonprofit organization that works to improve neighborhoods, and we believe that the Strategic Growth Council's Sustainable Communities Planning Grant and Incentives Program could create positive changes in these places. To maximize these grants' potential, we respectfully make the following requests:

First, as we are working locally but also guided by broader regional visions, we ask that you provide local planning funds and link them to SB 375. Local governments need resources, not only to plan for community needs, but also to link these plans to larger regional efforts, just as regional agencies need funding for regional planning. Local and regional collaboration is essential to address our shared challenges, and we hope this program will adequately fund and encourage these efforts.

Second, we ask the Council to reserve twenty percent of funds for disadvantaged communities and social justice efforts. This planning should help address significant infrastructure deficits in urban and rural infill areas; provide homes that are affordable to families of all incomes; create equitable transportation networks; provide nearby access to parks, natural resources, and farms; and address serious health concerns in lower-income neighborhoods. Without a dedicated setaside, we worry that work to address the most disadvantaged communities may not receive the emphasis it deserves.

Third, as a group committed to physical improvements in neighborhoods, we know that general plan changes are often not enough to create change on the ground. All city codes, particularly zoning codes, need to align for a project to move ahead. The funds should only be used for planning efforts that will make all the changes necessary for homes, jobs, parks and preserves, and complete streets to actually be created.

Finally, we have two requests related to the grant-making process. We would like to see grants be selected with the help of a public advisory committee that includes expertise in the full range of the Council's goals, such as public health, air quality, vibrant walkable and bikable neighborhoods, natural resource and farmland



protection, and the provision of housing and infrastructure for disadvantaged communities. We also hope that non-profits, universities, and COGs would be eligible to co-apply with applicants, but believe that it would be better for cities to select any for-profit partners after grants are awarded, to improve the likelihood that a public bidding process would allow us to comment on the teams that a local government might partner with.

Thank you for your hard work and your consideration of our requests.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Vu-Bang Nguyen", is written over a solid horizontal line.

Vu-Bang Nguyen, AICP
Land Use Program Coordinator
Urban Habitat